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3 MARKETING INFORMATION FOR CONSUMERS.

by

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Historical

Urban extension work began in New York State during World War I and has continued in three cities -- Buffalo, Rochester and Syracuse -- until this time. The pattern was similar to the one used in the rural areas on a regular basis except that during the war, the entire program was based on the needs of the emergency. Much of this could be classed as consumer food marketing service.

As early as 1939, a number of farm organizations, particularly fruit and vegetable groups, became interested in getting information to consumers about ample supplies of fruit and vegetable crops. An extension economist, with the aid of home economics specialists, gave instructions about how these commodities could be used or preserved. This work continued during World War II, with the aid of the New York State Emergency Food Commission.

In spite of the fact that this project was appreciated by consumers and producers, the consumer food marketing service was discontinued in New York City after the war, largely because of the lack of funds, but it was continued in a limited way in all other cities. With inadequate facilities and staff at Cornell and in the counties, the home demonstration agents carried on a reasonably effective program.

Organization

When RMA funds became available, two offices -- New York City and Ithaca -- were established to service the county Extension offices. The New York City office and staff is operated under contract with the U. S. Department of Agriculture, with some New York State funds, and certain services contributed by Connecticut and New Jersey.

This office services the counties in the periphery of the metropolitan area where home demonstration agents are located, as well as New York City and other nearby cities, through direct contacts with many kinds of organizations, and by means of radio, television and the press. At the present time, State legislation does not authorize local appropriations in New York City.

The Ithaca office covers the remaining counties in New York State, including farm, rural-nonfarm, and urban areas. This office is operated under the regular RMA Federal-State cooperative matching formula.

Staff and Operation

Each regional office is staffed with an agricultural economist, at least one home economist, and the necessary clerical staff.

The home economist working on this project in Ithaca, is housed with other members of the food information staff in the Department of Agricultural Economics, but she is a member, professionally, of the Department of Economics of the Household, in the College of Home Economics. She is responsible to that department for her subject matter.

The agricultural economist is responsible to the Department of Agricultural Economics for his subject matter.

In both offices, the home economist and the agricultural economist share the responsibility of preparing the weekly releases on available foods, the weekly memorandum to small institutions designed to help them feed groups of from 50 to 300 people more economically within the framework of good nutrition, extension bulletins dealing with food marketing, and with radio and television releases.

An advisory committee functions for the regional project in the New York Metropolitan area, in matters of policy. This is composed of the project leaders in the Department of Agricultural Economics, and the State leaders of home demonstration agents from New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. This group of six meets about four times a year to receive reports from the staff, plan for training schools and other special activities to be carried on by the staff, in cooperation with Extension workers in the three States.

Each year, since the work was started in the New York Metropolitan area in 1948, a one or two-day training school has been held for Extension workers, where they participate in, and report on the work they are doing with homemakers and producers.

Since the State Extension Enabling Act does not cover the five counties which comprise New York City, no State aid is available to carry on the regular type of Extension work there. Federal cooperative funds are not sufficient to conduct regular work there. Moreover, it has been our policy to place no Federal cooperative funds directly into urban work, except for a part-time home demonstration agent in the County of Queens (one of the five boroughs of New York City) on what might be called an experimental Extension program.

On April 1, 1946, our amended State law went into effect, authorizing State aid for home economics work in cities, in the counties having an urban population of 25,000 or more. This requires matching funds by the counties.

This amendment was sponsored primarily by farmers, through the New York State conference board of farm organizations, and not by consumers. The farm leaders believe that consumer food marketing extension work is one of the best ways to dispose of perishable products and is of benefit to both consumers and producers.

The entire consumer food marketing project, including staff from both colleges (agriculture and home economics) is now operated as a part of the Extension administration under the over-all direction of Dr. M. C. Bond, extension economist, and under the immediate direction of Dr. Carlton E. Wright, formerly in charge of the New York City office, but who is now located in Ithaca.

Policy

We have continued to emphasize, constantly, that the consumer food marketing extension project is a marketing project for consumers and, incidentally, for producers and not one of foods and nutrition, health or some other phase of human welfare.

In this way, the staff working on the consumer food marketing project does not duplicate the work of the home economics nutrition specialists, or the agricultural marketing specialists. However, the personnel of the consumer food marketing project calls frequently on the personnel in other fields in both colleges to help in the preparation of useful material for consumers and retailers.

Special Projects - With Results

One of the unusual projects which has been popular and successful over a three year period has been a leaflet entitled "Passover Meals." The New York Metropolitan area office distributed more than 40,000 copies of this leaflet; 13,500 were requests for individual copies and 26,000 were requests for large quantities.

These large quantity requests came from 113 different organizations including the Red Cross, welfare, health, public agencies, supermarkets, newspapers, radio, schools, libraries and 35 Jewish organizations.

Currants

In the spring of 1949, the currant growers in Ulster and Orange counties, the center of commercial currant growing, were in trouble; these currants always had been sold to processors. However, that year the processors still had most of their previous year's supply and did not want to purchase more, so, the growers had lost their market.

Through the county agricultural agents, various agencies were called in to meet with the farmers and devise ways of marketing their crop of currants.

Well ahead of the marketing season, the Extension Consumer Food Marketing Service distributed, through press and radio and other media, a leaflet on uses of currants. As a result, when fresh currants appeared on the market in quantity, the consumers were prepared to purchase and use them.

The growers were pleased with the creation of a new market for their product. More than one-half of their crop was disposed of in fresh form and at a fair price. This had never happened before.

Fresh currants now appear on the market each season.

Peaches

Each year, the New York State Peach Growers Association keeps in touch with the consumer food marketing service, giving harvest dates and crop prospects. This information helps the releases on buying and preparing food for individual consumers and for institutions.

For several years, in cooperation with the marketing services, the association prepared a "flier" for distribution through retail stores. Later, it was believed that the retail store distribution was not generally satisfactory, but that a leaflet was needed to be distributed for members of the association, through roadside stands and for use in baskets of peaches.

The association financed the printing of a leaflet which included varieties from local orchards, tips on selection, instructions about canning and freezing, and recipes.

The Extension Service cooperated in planning the format, in writing and in editing the recipes. A similar leaflet is being planned for 1954.

Finally

Producers and consumers who are informed about the consumer education work in food marketing, give strong support to this program to date, although they realize that more could be accomplished with additional staff and facilities. They believe it is helpful in providing information on the highly seasonal fruits and vegetables as they come on the market. They accept the idea that this program should not be limited to the products raised in New York State, but rather to the more important foods which consumers normally like and use, and which make up a good diet. Farmers view this program as one of developing better public relations between farmers and consumers, and one through which consumers get a better understanding of the foods available, their place in the diet, and the part that producers and distributors play in getting the food to the consumer.

The food marketing information program provides another way in which the agricultural and home demonstration agents may work together. In most counties, the home demonstration agent assumes responsibility for the dissemination of information to homemakers. This may be done in several ways -- through talks or columns which she may write in the local papers or through contacts she may have with those who conduct such programs and columns. The county agricultural agent counsels with her, to be sure that the produce about which she may be talking is available in the local retail stores and at reasonable prices. He also keeps her informed, as well as the specialists at the colleges, concerning the harvest periods and the quality of products going to the market. In some cases, the agricultural agent carries on this extension program while the home demonstration agent is on vacation. In more and more instances, both the agricultural agent and the home demonstration agent participate in television or radio programs designed to inform consumers about available foods, about their production and distribution, and to give suggestions for selection, preservation, and use for the family.

In the counties having larger metropolitan areas, the county extension group, particularly the home demonstration agent if she is responsible for local dissemination, maintains contact with producers or farm leaders and representatives of the retail trade. In some instances, so-called "councils" of producers and retailers have been developed. Periodically, they discuss the informational program, and ways in which their groups can help to make it fit the situation in their own market. The home demonstration agent frequently checks with retailers to be sure there is an abundant supply of the fruits, vegetables, meats, milk, eggs, etc., upon which particular attention is being focused. These trade representatives have been very cooperative, and very helpful.

We do not claim that the New York State plan of operating a consumer food marketing project is perfect, nor that we do everything to perfection -- nor everything that ought to be done.

We try to do the best we can, with our present staff and facilities, in as many ways as possible. No doubt, some other organizational plan could be developed, and probably would work as well.





